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ABSTRACT

Early childhood educators are advised to confront difficulties arising from Alaska's economic problems by establishing coalitions between families with young children and service providers, with the intention of creating new programs and maintaining existing family support and education programs. Evidence of the desirability of a wide range of family-provider partnerships is summarized in: (1) discussions of the appeal of such programs from the perspective of public policy; and (2) reports of findings from research and evaluation studies of program effectiveness and the role of social support in child rearing. Subsequent discussion describes desired features of such coalitions and specifies key principles that underlie them. The concluding section of the presentation details a research-based plan which conference participants might develop to implement partnership programs on a pilot basis. (RH)

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Keynote address: Anchorage Association for the Education of Young Children: Early Childhood Professionals and Changing Families

April 10, 1987

Dr. Heather B. Weiss

I would like to begin by thanking you for the opportunity to speak with you today about families , their changing needs, and some of the ways in which we need to respond to those needs. As some of you know, this is my second visit to Alaska, and I have many happy memories of my first. One of those memories includes pride in having successfully resolved a moral dilemma, and bearing witness to a demonstration of tact by Alaskans. This moral dilemma occurred when I was in Fairbanks in a bush plane depot waiting to fly out to Huslia. You can imagine the scene. It was in January. It was dark. It was cold. Everybody was dressed with several layers of clothing waiting to get on the plane. As I walked in the terminal, several members of our party who had arrived earlier were hanging around. An official-looking man yelled out to me, "How much do you weigh?" It's rare in my life that people ask me this question in public, and I was somewhat taken aback. At this point, I realized that we were in a direct tradeoff between my vanity versus collective death. I'm pleased to say that I in fact yelled out my correct weight, presumably thereby saving the plane from going down, but that in return, the Huslians, whose village we were going to visit, said, "Oh, that's 20 pounds more than we put down," which I thought was a demonstration of remarkable tact.

I appreciate the opportunity to talk with you, particularly because you are on the eve of a new and comprehensive look at the problems facing Alaska's

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young people and children. Through Governor Cowper's recent creation of the Governor's Commission on Children and Youth, which has been charged with making recommendations for state action early next year, I expect you'll be taking a thorough look at the situation of children and families in your state. I recently saw a press release that indicated that the 15-member commission will include legislators, child care and health professionals, parents, educators, and business and labor leaders. I hope that as early childhood educators, you will have substantial input into the commission's deliberations. This morning, I'd like to give you some food for thought about what some of that input might be.

I think it is important to integrate your perspectives as early childhood educators into the Commission plan for improving the situation of children, youth, and families in Alaska for several reasons. Through your work in child care centers and early childhood programs, you come in contact with children and families and have a sense of their changing needs. You also have an important perspective on the vital role families play in a child's development and on how early childhood services can support parental roles. Those of you that are involved with Head Start or others programs that seek active parental involvement through classroom and Board participation recognize the critical and supportive role parents can play for a program. I suspect it is no accident that early childhood educators around the country have often been responsible for initiating state and local family support and education programs. These programs are designed to prevent many kinds of damage to children by strengthening both families and communities as contexts for development. I think that these programs will be increasingly at the center of debates about overall social welfare and educational reform. Early

childhood educators with your skills and experience dealing with young children and families need to be heard in these larger debates and need to help in shaping the programs that result.

In the course of working with the Commission, and with other kinds of Coalition-building activities around the state, you'll be working with representatives from other professional and public groups, I hope with a good and cooperative division of labor, unlike the one that prevailed on another recent trip here to Alaska. There was a clinical pediatrician and a psychologist involved in screening who were having a lot of difficulty working and getting along with one another. Therefore, they decided to go on a retreat, to see if they could work out some of their differences, and learn to get along a little better. So they came up to a remote camp in Alaska, and they fished and they hunted, and they hiked, and they did a variety of things together, trying to work out some of their difficulties. One day, when they were out for a hike, the psychologist took a rapid detour to the right because a bear was coming at them down the trail. This left the pediatrician there to confront the bear. Just as this was about to happen, the psychologist yelled, "You figure out how to treat it, and I'll go find more." I tell this story because I think it's important that a variety of groups be there to confront the bear, and that they work together to do so. I recognized that these are hard times in Alaska, and in fact the bear may be your economic difficulties.

Due to the state's economic problems, basic services are being cut, and there are not enormous amounts of new money to start new programs. Like the small boy in the horse barn, who, seeing the piles of manure, optimistically says, "there must be a pony in here somewhere," I think the pony here in

Alaska is the opportunity to try small initiatives, and through efforts like your Commission, to work with many constituencies concerned with the well-being and productivity of future generations. I think its' important to work together to mount some of these small initiatives in tough times and also to design an agenda to put into action when times get better.

This morning, I want to argue that one set of small initiatives worthy of your consideration is the maintenance of existing and the creation of new family-oriented programs. Efforts to provide support and education to families with young children should be among the central pieces of Alaska's efforts to improve the well-being of its children and youth. These programs are designed to prevent a whole series of problems which can be very costly to the public purse if they are not prevented. These problems include school failure, abuse and neglect, public dependence and the tragedy of children developing far below their potential. I think there is a nice fit between some of the kinds of programs I will describe and your current fiscal situation, your diverse and far flung communities, and the data that suggest the situation of children, youth, and families are deteriorating. This fits with your fiscal situation because at least in the pilot phase, these programs may not necessarily require huge expenditures. Other states have begun state-sponsored pilot programs on a small scale and then gradually added more and more programs as initial ones proved their worth. Because they are grounded in local needs and resources, these programs can be designed to suit the needs of the diverse set of communities around the state. I will describe later how other states have accommodated such diversity through state facilitation of locally responsive programs. Finally, Alaska, like most other states, is experiencing a rise in problems among adolescents--from suicide and substance

abuse to teen pregnancy and school drop-out. Early, and for some families, continuous intervention to support families offers at least some hope that in the future fewer adolescents will experience these problems.

I'm going to argue for these family support and education programs here and now because I think programs for children only are not enough; although we certainly need and should also be advocates for good child care and the development of a first class plan for a child care system, as well as quality early childhood education programs. Child care is in fact one of the first items for the Governor's Commission to confront, as is indicated on his press release. I'm going to argue for these family support and education services because I think they may not get the attention that arguments for center-based pre-kindergarten programs for at-risk children or quality child care get, because these other programs have been around longer and now have a more fully developed constituency. I will not describe the demographic and other kinds of changes in families and how they impact on service delivery at great length this morning, because I think all of you, either as service delivery people, program administrators, advocates, or whatever, are familiar on a day-to-day basis with how changes in family structure, income stress for families, and other kinds of factors have an impact on children and families. These changes both <u>necessitate</u> new ways to strengthen and support families in the human development role, <u>and</u> they make it harder to do so. As early childhood educators on the front line, you are in a position to convey some of the problems young families face to the Governor's Commission and to the larger public forum it will create. You are also in a position to help shape creative and responsive new approaches. So I address you as professionals

with considerable insight into how to see that Alaska's children do, as the title of this conference suggests, reach new heights.

Early childhood educators should be among those taking the lead in advocating a marriage, not a divorce, between families with young children and those who serve them for several reasons. The evidence for partnerships, and for the provision of everything from simple or low-cost family support and education programs, to more costly comprehensive, and intensive ones for very high-risk families, comes from a variety of sources. I will summarize two of them briefly here: first, I will briefly present evidence about the appeal of these programs from the public policy arena and then I will cover evidence from research and program evaluation about program effectiveness and the role social support seems to play in child rearing. Then, I want to talk about what some of these marriages and partnerships should look like, and some of the key principles that underlie them. We are far from having a perfect understanding of what kinds of family support and education programs work for what kinds of families and communities; but research and practice do suggest at least some principles and guidelines. Finally, I want to lay out a plan you might develop in order to try out some of these programs on a small-scale pilot basis, through a state and private partnership that provides grant money on a competitive basis to communities around the state. This would allow various agencies and groups to start up a variety of these kinds of initiatives and test them out. The plan that I'm going to present is derived from a study my colleagues and I are doing on state initiatives to provide support and education to families as part of education and sometimes social service reforms.

Why are preventive family-oriented approaches--as opposed to say those that focus exclusively on the child--increasingly advocated at the state level as one part of the strategy to improve the lot of children? I think there are several reasons. First, social problems such as infant morbidity, youth crime, school failures, and teen pregnancy are diagnosed as stemming in part from breakdowns in parenting and family functioning, and also in part from a weak social infrastructure of community support for young families. Notice here I mention problems in both families and communities. Some critics, such as Gary Bauer, who recently wrote a report on families for President Reagan, blame the family, arguing that parents have shirked their responsibility to care for and nurture their children. Others argue it's the community; that services are under-funded, have deteriorated or are nonexistent, and that the community bears the responsibility for that. Family support and education programs are notable because they have a complex diagnosis of why there are more problems of children and youth, and in that they offer a complex solution. The family, in a partnership with formal and informal community supports, is seen not only as the locus of problems, but also of some of the solutions. For the public policy arena, the design and ideology of these programs illustrates the integration for two usually separate questions into one: What should government or the community do for families, and what should families do for themselves, <u>into one question</u>: What can government and community institutions do to enhance the family's capacity to help itself and others? This allows a political marriage of liberal community do-gooders, with conservative individual-family-should-do-for-itself-ers. The solution involves strengthening both families and communities as contexts for child development.

I think these programs offer an ideological "middle ground," and one that is important to state and explore quite straightforwardly, because ideological factors often drive programs and policies. As the debates about the future of the family and its role in a revised welfare state have evolved, many parties to it are acknowledging the central role that values as well as data and evidence play in shaping family policy and programs. "It is neither possible nor desirable to attempt to construct a family policy on the basis of presumed social science knowledge," U.S. Senator Moynihan recently argued in a series of lectures entitled Family and Nation; rather, "family policy must reflect shared values." Family support and education programs have gotten support at the state level in several places because they appeal to values held by both the left and the right. Maryland is a case in point. They have a small family support initiative going there because legislators from both sides of the aisle can see something in it that strengthens their particular views about the directions in which families ought to go.

Let me caution you here that while I think family support and education programs can offer a middle ground, a political middle ground, the Minnesota state example suggests that sometimes that middle ground can be narrow. Specifically, Minnesota has an Early Childhood Family Education Program whose enabling legislation deliberately excludes child care as one of the services which the program can provide. This was done to mollify those who don't want to support nontraditional families with working mothers.

The second reason why I think there's increased advocacy for preventive family-oriented approaches comes from some direct evidence of the effectiveness of such programs in enhancing early childhood development, and

some indirect evidence about the importance of social support for good parenting and family functioning.

The direct evidence comes from a set of early childhood demonstration programs, many of which were begun during the much-maligned War on Poverty in an effort to prevent school failure among low-income children. Most of you are probably familiar with the results of the evaluation of these programs. I won't go into the results in great depth here, but I will try and touch on a couple of highlights. Back in the mid-seventies, Urie Bronfenbrenner, on the one hand, and Goodson and Hess, on the other, reviewed the evidence from a set of early childhood interventions, many of which had begun in the 1960s. What they found was the suggestion that family-oriented as opposed to exclusively child-centered early childhood early intervention programs may produce more long-lasting gains than the strictly child-centered ones. At that time, they argued that we need more evidence to substantiate this, and in particular, more longitudinal evidence that would prove that the gains that were evident at the end of a program were maintained for a much more substantial amount of time. Since then, the Consortium for Longitudinal Studies at Cornell, formed by many of these early intervention programs, pooled the data from a variety of interventions, collected new data, and found that the children who participated in these programs were less likely to be retained in grade or placed in special education.

Subsequently, one member of the Consortium, the Perry Preschool Project, a program concluded by the High/Scope group in Ypsilanti, Michigan, followed up their program participants and their control group into their late teens. Their participants were low-income disadvantaged Black kids who received the program as pre-schoolers in the 1960s in Ypsilanti. They found that these

kids were less likely to have been pregnant as teenagers, more likely to have gotten some continuing education as well as finished high school, less likely to have been involved in the juvenile justice system, etc. Hearing that list of outcomes, it's clear that the program was able to effect a variety of things, which, from a public policy point of view, are very important because they lessen dependence on the public purse. Several other longitudinal follow-up studies have been done; and by and large their results corroborate those of the Perry Preschool Project. The state of our knowledge, then, is such that we're beginning to find mutually-corroborating evidence about the long-term importance of some of these early childhood interventions including those that provide family support and education services as well as care and education for the child. I find it ironic that the Perry Preschool Project, which involved services for the children and in addition, a once a week home visit to the family, often gets described in such a way that the role of the family is de-emphasized.

Because very few of these program evaluations looked at the impact of the program on the family or examined the causal processes underlying the changes in the child, per se; it's very difficult to make more than a suggestive argument that provisions for family involvement and parent education and support were what made or at least helped to produce some of the program effects. At the same time, it's also hard to argue that they were not one of the major contributing factors in producing some of the long-term positive results. So, at this stage I think we have some mutually-corroborating evidence and that from it at least a suggestive case can be made that programs that work with parents and provide them with education and support can make a

difference down the road in certain kinds of child development outcomes. I would underline that the evidence is suggestive, not exhaustive, however.

The indirect evidence for more family-oriented approaches which emphasize support and education for parents comes primarily from the research on social support, not from the program evaluation literature.

Let me step back and define social support. Typically, when researchers use the term, it has three components. I will describe the components, and what they mean in terms of the kinds of family support and education programs that I'm suggesting for your consideration here. The first component is information. Typically, these programs provide information about child health and development, parenting skills, family communication, and aspects of child development. Second, they provide emotional and appraisal support. This is attention, empathy, reinforcement and feedback, both negative and positive, for adults in their parenting and adult roles. Finally, they often provide instrumental assistance. This includes transportation, and referrals to other services. I came to the social support literature after having looked at a lot of family programs and after having tried to summarize what they are providing for parents. When I looked at the research on social support, I could not help but be struck by how much what these programs were doing conformed to what many researchers defined as the core of social support.

Since the 1970s, questions about the structure and composition of social networks, and the functions of social support, were widely addressed among social and health researchers with promising results for those interested in the design of individual and family support interventions. As Cobb (1976) noted in an early review on the topic, "It is not news that supportive interactions are important. . . . What is new," he suggested, "is the

assembling of hard evidence that adequate social support can protect people in crisis from a wide variety of pathological states, from low birth weight, to death, from arthritis through tuberculosis to depression, alcoholism, and other psychiatric illnesses." Health and mental health researchers, as well as family sociologists and child development researchers, have focused attention on social support as a moderator of life stress and examined support as a coping resource. Some have specifically examined the mediating effects of social support on different aspects of parenting attitudes, and parent-child interaction. In longitudinal study of the development of a group of Hawaiian children considered vulnerable because of a series of socioeconomic, biological, and family factors, Werner and Smith (1982), for example, found that the presence of an informal, multi-generational network of kin to provide support to the family in its child rearing was one of the variables that distinguished the children who grew into competent adults from those who did not.

At this early stage in the understanding of the distribution, sources, processes, and effects of social support, these various research studies have contributed empirical evidence for the working hypothesis that social support for young families plays a crucial role in family coping, well-being, and child development. As an article on child-rearing in the NYT was headlined several years ago, "Child Rearing Needs Friends." Many family support and education programs, as I understand them, try and provide those friends. I think it is no accident that time after time when people interview program participants, they describe their group leader or their home visitor, or whoever is providing the service, as a friend. However, it's also important to recognize here that social support is unevenly distributed and sometimes

unavailable or insufficient. Further, some studies indicate that in the case of extremely stressed families, informal support alone is insufficient. It may well be that one of the reasons some parents lack is social support because they don't have the psychological and social skills necessary to garner it. Would the provision of social support to them be useful? Or some other approach better?

I raise these questions because I think that our understanding of the programmatic implications of social support research is at the level of the tip of the iceberg, but nonetheless I think there is sufficient evidence about the importance of social support for parents to suggest that public policy makers pay attention to family support and education programs because they have the potential to prevent an array of damaging outcomes for children. Researchers also need to be creative in examining these programs to get a better sense of their potential. Our job as practitioners is to find out what kinds of support and education different people need, and to try and tailor it so it's appropriate.

The third argument for creating and maintaining existing family support and education programs comes from a value or belief that the institution most responsible for the welfare of young children is the family, and that the family as an institution is under severe stress and requires new and innovative kinds of support to do its job in child rearing and nurturing its members. We all know about the demographic and economic changes that families are now undergoing. As a result, families have changed, and so have their traditional sources of support--the extended family, neighbors, and community institutions such as churches and affinity groups. Changes in the family and their sources of support mean that families may be in need of two things:

help in reinforcing their traditional sources of support, and in building new ones.

Demographic and economic changes in families also mean that those advocating family support and education programs are confronted with a paradox: They are advocating services which require a family's time and energy when families have less and less time and energy. In the April, 1987 issue of the Phi Delta Kappan, Heath & McLaughlin, in an article entitled the "Need For A New Child Resource Policy," used this paradox to argue that parents should be bypassed in favor of a focus on the school as a broker of services for children within the larger community. Their paper is an articulate statement of the divorce position, one that says we should not waste resources strengthening families but rather spend them by enabling community institutions to take over more responsibility for child development and socialization.

Specifically, they say that families, even rich and middle-class ones, are messing up in their child-rearing responsibilities. Further, demographic changes means families are weaker and have less time and energy to get involved with kids, and certainly with family-school partnerships, and programs that demand even more of their time. They make this argument particularly with respect to education reform efforts that suggest the importance of partnerships between the home and the school. I think it's important to confront their argument. First, there is some, and I underline some, truth to their argument, and it's better for proponents of family-oriented approaches to strengthening early childhood development to acknowledge that, than to deny it. New programs, sometimes find themselves in the situation of giving a party and no one comes. Or, they find that those

most in need don't come. Often, this is because families see it as source of stress, in that it eats up time and energy, rather than as a source of support. I think it's important to acknowledge this, think through the implications for programming, and figure out alternatives.

Heath and McLaughlin argue that we need to turn to community institutions like the Boy Scouts, the Big Sisters, and ballet classes to socialize children and instill social competence. This is not the place for a protracted response to their argument, but I would like to make three points. First, I think it is deep in American ideology and values that the family has the prime responsibility for a young child's socialization, even though the family is increasingly sharing that with other institutions. Second of all, I think family support and education programs recognize that the responsibility for child socialization is shared with the family and with other community institutions; in fact they often <u>are</u> the community institutions with which parents share their child rearing responsibilities. The Heath and McLaughlin argument presents an either/or situation: the family or community institutions, when in fact I think it's possible to construct a model, particularly where young children are involved, wherein we try and strengthen and support families while at the same time strengthening and supporting some of the other community institutions that help families with the socialization of their children. So I don't think it has to be Big Brothers versus the family, but rather Big Brothers and other family support services, and the family.

Finally, I think there is plenty of evidence that all types of parents, not only "ladies of leisure," participate in various kinds of family support and education programs, both out of a deep-seated desire to learn things to

help their children, and also because they find that they grow themselves. Child rearing can be lonely, and a not-often rewarded pursuit. These programs provide reinforcement to parents in their parenting roles. This is something that even busy parents often suggest that they need.

For these reasons, I argue that family support and education programs should not be seen as froufrou, but as integral part of a state's mix of policy and programs for children and families. These programs are and should be provided by a variety of sources, including child care and early childhood programs, as well as other kinds of programs and under other professional auspices within a community. As a recent report called "the Plan of Action for Children in Illinois," a 1987 task force report on the Status of Children in Illinois suggested (and let me add here that their report of a year-long effort is in some ways similar to that on which you are embarking with your newly-initiated Governor's Commission on Children and Youth) "It is not likely that merely investing more public dollars in the same institutions and programs which have traditionally served our children will cause their problems to disappear. Rather, we must support children and their families differently. We need to be innovative, and we need to bolster promising and proven program which have hithertofore been ignored or meagerly supported."

What are these family support and education programs? What are the important principles underlying their design and their interaction with families? First, these programs demonstrate an ecological approach to promoting human development in that they foster child and adult growth by enhancing both the family's child rearing capacities and the community context in which that child rearing takes place. Second, they are community-based and sensitive to local needs and resources, even when they have a federal or state

sponsor. Third, they emphasize primary and secondary prevention of various child and family dysfunctions. Fourth, they have developed innovative and multilateral, as opposed to exclusively professional, approaches to service delivery through such means as peer support, creative use of volunteers and paraprofessionals, and the promotion of informal networks. You'll notice that these characteristics or principles are found in a broad range of programs across many professional areas--mental health, prenatal and infant health and development, social work, early childhood education, etc.

These programs are also distinguished from more traditional and treatment-oriented health, social, and educational services in several ways. Social policies and programs for children and families often originate in efforts to prevent social problems rather than in efforts to promote or enhance health or well-being. Both rationales underlie the family support and education movement. Regardless of rationale, however, these programs report that they attempt to build on family strengths to empower parents, and that they incorporate a non-deficit service delivery philosophy, whereby providers do things with, not to, families. They have tried to reconceptualize the relationship between families and their sources of assistance, moving from a model where parents are viewed as passive recipients of didactic professional or scientific expertise, to a model wherein the parent, other parents, and professionals all have expertise and support to share. Parents are both recipients and providers of support through peers support and informal helping arrangements. So redefinition of the role of the professional is one of the hallmarks of these programs. The role of the program participant is also redefined in these usually voluntary programs, because parents have considerable latitude in determining the amount and nature of their program

involvement. Many programs individualize their services in accord with each family's strengths and needs.

What does all this mean here and now in Alaska? As I mentioned at the outset, several of my colleagues and I have been doing the research for a set of case studies of state-sponsored family support and education program initiatives. Specifically, we've been looking at Missouri, Minnesota, Connecticut, and Maryland in this round of our research. These states are all very different, but they have a core set of processes that led to their state initiatives in common. All of these states, some of which now have a full-blown state-wide program, began their initiatives in a very small pilot program fashion. Three of the four states, the exception being Missouri, began with an agency of state government sending out a request for proposals around the state to generate a set of community developed proposals for family support and education initiatives. They then put all of these proposals together in a grant competition and funded a set of them. Minnesota, for example, began this process in 1976. Through this kind of a pilot program process, they first funded six programs and then gradually added more and more each year as the budget allowed. In 1984 the state passed legislation institutionalizing these programs in all community school districts around the state. They now have a budget of $16 million dollars a year, and programs that are almost state-wide.

Connecticut is a relative newcomer. They began in 1986 with $150,000 worth of funding from their State Department of Children and Youth Services. Through the kind of grants competition I described, they have funded ten programs at 15,000 a year each. Fifteen thousand dollars typically doesn't start an entirely new program. In the case of CT, they gave their money out

to a variety of services which then developed a parent education and support center as part of their activities. The money went to places as diverse as Stratford Community Services, the Save the Children Federation, the Hamden Mental Health Services, Catholic Charities, and to the Town of Windsor. This shows you the diversity of community agencies that can be involved. In some cases, these agencies began new programs, and in others the grant gave them funding for ones that they already had underway. I mention this because I think it's important to realize that in Alaska as well as in all the other states, there are already family support and education initiatives underway. The good ones need to be reinforced, and new ones need to be developed.

Maryland is another pertinent example for you in that they have a public-private partnership underway. These two local foundations in conjunction with the state have set up six pilot family support and education programs for teen parents. These programs are designed to improve parenting skills, to develop the teenager's educational and job training skills and to prevent future pregnancies. Perhaps Alaska could embark on such a public-private partnership.

In several of the states, especially Missouri, early childhood educators were one of the driving forces working with a coalition of other leaders to get these programs going. Missouri, is implementing its new Parents As Teachers Program statewide. They have a model beginning prenatally and going on through the time the child is three, which involves the provision of home visits and some parent groups to new parents in the state. All of these initiatives were small pilot programs to start.

Three of the states have employed what we call "hybrid" strategies. They're not top-down or bottom-up. I say Top-down in the sense that the state

says "march" and everybody marches, and bottom-up in the sense that the state funds anything without any guidelines or constraints. They are hybrids because they are designed to be locally-owned and responsive to local needs and resources while the state serves as the facilitator, funder, at least in part, and as the provider of broad guidelines for quality programs. In each of the cases we are studying, the state provides monitoring and technical assistance. The technical assistance includes training, help with outreach strategies, help with curriculum development and such.

I have brought along copies of the request for proposals that went out in Maryland and Connecticut for those who are interested. What these "RFP"s illustrate is the kind of guidelines the states have used in defining the parameters within which local communities need to operate to receive these grant from the state. In each case, the state either built or has begun to build an infrastructure for training and program development. This infrastructure is necessary for the growth and expansion of these new services, and to reinforce new ways of doing business. Through this infrastructure the states set up processes and procedures to deal with such issues such as the credentialling of the people who are providing parent education and other kinds of services, the creation of a statewide system of networking among programs, the provision of in-service training, etc.

I started out by saying, like the boy looking for the pony in the barn, this is a time to turn the adversity of low oil revenues to account. I think it's an opportune time for you as early childhood educators to think about a marriage with families as embodied in family support and education programs, and to work for a relatively low-cost state pilot initiative, not unlike those being tried in others states. I think you'll find, as these other states

have, that you get many more good proposals than you can possibly fund, but that at least this kind of initiative represents a small start tnat perhaps can be expanded later. As many of you know, the public-private partnership idea, particularly in tight economic times, has a great deal of appeal. I know of at least one regional foundation that would be willing to explore such a plan with the state of Alaska. Perhaps there are more. So as you go about the next two days of what look like very exciting workshops, I urge you to think about your roles in a range of activities. First, think about the kinds of things that you want to say to the Governor's Commission on Children and Youth. Second, think about ways of making your own service user-friendly. And finally, think about the proposition that I laid out. Do you think an initiative such as those going on in Maryland or Connecticut would work in Alaska? How would you shape it? What do you think it ought to do? What can you do in your community both to get such a state initiative going, and ultimately to respond to it?